

**WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
TACOMA NARROWS BRIDGE TOLL RATE PUBLIC HEARING
VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT**

June 10, 2009

Commissioners present on conference call hearing:

Chair O'Neal

Vice Chair Elmira Forner

Commissioner Parker

Commissioner Ford

Commissioner Moser

Commissioner Hill

Commissioner Distler

Others present on conference call:

Bob Larson, KIRO Radio

Commissioner Ford

Good morning my name is Richard Ford with the Washington State Transportation Commission. It is now past 10 o'clock on June 10, 2009. It is time to begin our proposed rule making hearing on Tacoma Narrows Bridge. It was published CR 102 on May 5, 2009 under Washington State Register 09-10-067. Dan O'Neal is on the phone, Chair of the Transportation Commission, couldn't be here in Olympia today, he asked that I conduct this hearing. The testimony at this hearing is being recorded for purposes of developing a rule under the Washington Administrative Procedures Act. Paul Locke wants to speak – Paul would you mind coming and standing here so that our recorder can pick your comments up. We want to make sure that what you have to say we are able to get it recorded.

Paul Locke, citizen

I'm Paul W. Locke. To control these toll increases and help to get more users of this bridge I believe we should be doing away with the runs for Southworth and Bremerton, and have those people use the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. We do not have the money to buy the ferries and that we need. The operating cost keeps going up. It is absolutely necessary that you reduce, I believe by at least six ferries, by taking care and getting rid of these two routes the Southworth and the Bremerton. I listened to the radio this morning and our President claims he going to balance the federal budget. It's absolutely necessary that he goes through there will not be federal funds. They're borrowing all the money that they are paying out. I read articles in the paper that the federal Transportation Fund has no money. It's absolutely necessary that we do get rid of these two terminals, Bremerton and Southworth ferry runs. They can save, I believe, the cost of six ferries.

Commissioner Ford

Thank you Paul we appreciate it. I hope that everyone that was listening to what Paul had to say-his recommendation is that they close down the Southworth and Bremerton terminals and people in those areas use the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

Chair O'Neal

I'm sorry Dick-he was saying that what we ought to do is close down the Southworth ferry and the Bremerton ferries.

Commissioner Ford

Correct and people can drive over the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and the savings would be substantial. The purpose of today's hearing is to review and consider adoption of the proposal to amend the following rule: WAC 468-270-070. Reema do you want to give a brief reminder to the Commission-this was all discussed at our May 5th meeting, but I want to remind you what it is we've agreed to do.

Reema Griffith

Okay. We sent you the amended section out of the WAC. The main changes we made were to delete references to the expiration dates of the current rates and we added a footnote that says that these toll rates will remain in effect until changed by the Commission, so that leave you full flexibility at any time regardless date to adjust the rates as needed, and then of course, by not adjusting the current rates they will remain at \$4 for cash and \$2.75 for the electronic transponders.

Chair O'Neal

I move the adoption of the amended rule.

Commissioner Moser

I second.

Commissioner Ford

It's been moved and seconded. Is there any discussion by any of the members of the Commission?

Commissioner Forner

I wasn't at the last Commission meeting. I was out of the country so I didn't have an opportunity to discuss looking at future revenue needs and the sustainability of our obligation to have adequate reserves to meet our contract for paying back the capital costs and the operation of the tolling system. As we know we are still in a recession and people are driving less because of high gas prices and there has been a significant increase in the number of people riding transit. In fact I was at a Metro meeting yesterday and they said they've had a 30 percent increase because people are now beginning to realize that they have to use public transportation. There has also been a huge push both on the national level and the state level to get people into public transportation, and that's good for the environment and it's certainly good for congestion, but it's not good for looking at our revenue coming across the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

I feel very uncomfortable in not at least having some increase at this point and time just so that we don't have to hit the consumers with a large increase if fall short of our obligation. I think people can handle 15-25 cents much more than they can handle a dollar increase. We've noticed that in our personal income-our light bills have gone up and we know that it's not going to get any less expensive, so I'm not very comfortable with that, so I will leave my comments at that point.

Commissioner Ford

I don't want to get into rebuttal, but if we were not to act on this today there would be no tolls on the bridge effective July 1. To raise the rates we have to go through the process from scratch and that is at best a 90-day period, so I would hope that people would keep that in mind. I don't mean to sway anybody's vote one way or the other with it, but the fact is we would have zero revenue for probably at least three or four months on the bridge if we vote no.

Chair O'Neal

I think we ought to say something about the substantive part of this discussion because at the last meeting we did talk about all of these matters. We heard from WSDOT and we looked at the projected revenues and the coverage and there was some action by the state legislature and it looked to me, and I think most of the others that were there, that we did have adequate coverage and so for that reason we decided to stay with the existing tolls, but leaving the option open, which we are doing with this motion, to take another look as we have more experience. Gas prices are going up, they shot up by a huge amount in the last month or so. I could have an impact, but I think we are trying to maintain some flexibility here and we can watch the numbers and if we have to make an adjustment we'll do it.

Commissioner Ford

Any other comments otherwise I'm going to do a role call vote because we want to know how each person voted.

Commissioner Hill

"Aye"

Commissioner O'Neal

"Aye"

Commissioner Moser

"Aye"

Commissioner Parker

"Aye"

Commissioner Forner

"No"

Commissioner Ford

“Aye”

Commissioner Ford

Commissioner Distler is absent. The vote is 5 “Aye”-1 “No” and the WAC is approved. You are right Dan we will be monitoring this on a regular basis. We will know more in the fall and I think that’s what we discussed is that we would take a close look at it sometime in the fall.

Commissioner Distler

I had some phone problems. I vote “No”.

Commissioner Ford

The motion passed 5 “Aye” 2 “No”.

Are there any further comments before we adjourn? Hearing none-Thank you!

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL